Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program
Division of Fisheries & Wildlife
Route 135
Westborough, MA 01581
(508)792-7270, ext. 200

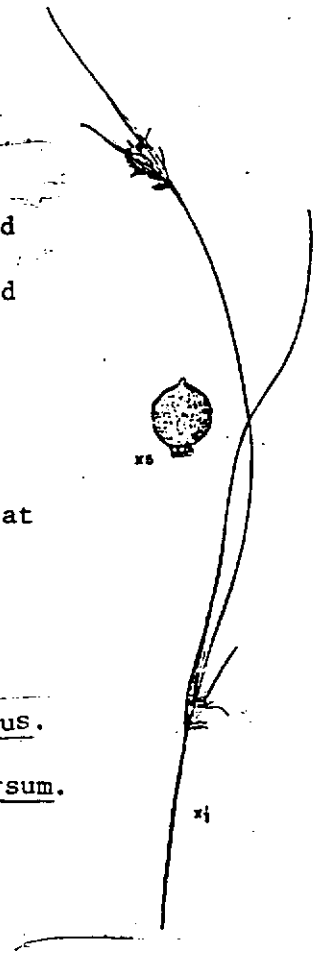
MASSACHUSETTS RARE AND ENDANGERED PLANTS

PAPILLOSE NUT-RUSH

(*Scleria pauciflora* Muhl. var. *caroliniana* (Willd.) Wood.)

DESCRIPTION

A member of the Sedge family, *Scleria pauciflora* var *caroliniana* is a grasslike, 8-19½ inch (2-5 dm.) herb with a stiff, erect stem that arises from hard, knotty rhizomes. The leaves are narrow, less than ½ of an inch (1-3 mm.) wide with the lower leaves shorter in length than the upper leaves which often extend above the stem. Both the leaves and the stem have straight, spreading hairs. The cyme (a type of inflorescence) is subtended by a bract approximately 4/5 of an inch to 2 inches (2-5 cm.) in size. Flowers are arranged spirally with the spikelets (flower clusters) in a small terminal cluster or occasionally in 1 or 2 short-stalked axillary ones. Stamens and pistils do not occur in the same flower and are often found in separate spikes. Staminate spikes are few flowered and the pistillate spikelets are one flowered. The achene (a small fruit that does not open at maturity) is less than one inch (1.5-2 mm.) thick and spherical in shape.



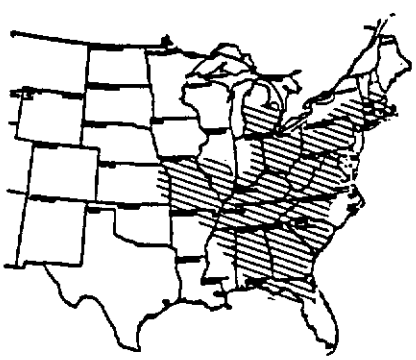
Brown, E.L. The Monocotyledoneae The Cattails to Orchids. Ohio State Univ. Press. 1967.

HABITAT IN MASSACHUSETTS

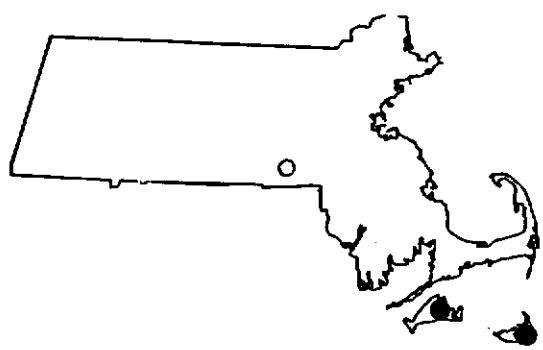
The two current records of *Scleria pauciflora* in Massachusetts occur in dry, open, grassy areas dominated by *Andropogon scoparius*. and surrounded by scrub oak barrens and/or oak-pitch pine woods. Associated species include *Polygala nuttallii* and *Linum intercursum*.

RANGE

Papillose Nut-rush is distributed from southeastern New Hampshire to souther Michigan, south to Florida and west to Mississippi, Arkansas and Missouri.



Distribution of Papillose Nut-rush



● Verified since 1978
○ Reported prior to 1978

Distribution in Massachusetts by Town

(continued overleaf)

1985

POPULATION STATUS

Considered "Endangered" in Massachusetts, Scleria pauciflora has two current records (1978 to present) and one historical record sited within the state. Its rarity in this state is related to the fact that in Massachusetts it is at the northern edge of its range and also because of the apparent scarcity of suitable habitat in which the plant grows.